"MY FRIENDS"

A Fireside Chat on the War

by

NATIVE SON

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IF WE MUST DIE

If we must die—let it not be like hogs
Hunted and penned in an inglorious spot,
While round us bark the mad and hungry dogs,
Making their mock at our accursed lot.

If we must die—oh, let us nobly die,
So that our precious blood may not be shed
In vain; then even the monsters we defy
Shall be constrained to honor us though de

Oh, Kinsmen! We must meet the common foe;
Though far outnumbered, let us still be brave,
And for their thousand blows deal one death-blow!
What though before us lies the open grave?
Like men we'll face the murderous, cowardly pa
Pressed to the wall, dying, but—fighting back!

—Claude McKay

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A Fireside Chat on the War

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By NATIVE SON

My Friends:

In this moment of crisis, it is proper that the voice of the working man should be heard. The President governs for all, the priests pray for all, the soldiers fight for all, (so, at any rate, we are told) but it is the working man who pays for all. In times of peace he pays in labor and in sweat. In war he pays in blood. It is always the working man and the farmers who are placed in the front line trenches. The sons of the rich stay behind the lines and direct. I have been to war and I know.

That is why I claim the privilege of a broadcast. I am a black working man, but I am a native son, as American as any white man in this country. My people were here as early as the family of President Roosevelt. We Negroes have labored and helped to make this country what it is. We have fought in all its wars, from the War of Independence to the first World War. In fact Crispus Attucks, a Negro, was the first American to die in

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dent talks abou
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know it, I know it, everybody knows it. But in order to make you feel that you will be getting the real inside dope in a confidential manner, I shall begin by saying: "My friends, let us sit down, you and I, and talk this thing over together." That piece of baloney being out of the way, we can now get down to business.

Is America in Danger?

The President says that Hitler seems to be winning the European war, and for that reason, this country is in danger of being invaded. Maybe the country is really in danger. But from the start this whole invasion business seemed phoney to me. I went to France in the last war, and I saw what it takes to carry a million men across the Atlantic and to keep them there. Germany is very near to England. Yet everybody says that Hitler had to capture Norway and the Channel ports and get within a few miles of England in order to attempt a successful invasion. Who is such a fool as to believe that Hitler can transport millions of men and all

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and supplies needed to invade this
try, across nearly 3,000 miles of sea? The Yanke
Clipper takes only 20 passengers at a time. How many clippers will Hitler need to land a million men in America? Hitler would have to spend years in preparation before he could invade this country. Furthermore, the President knows that all this talk about invasion is just a lot of hooey. My wife Leonora, who is a Red, told me that the other day the generals of the army and navy made an official statement that this country was in no danger of invasion. And if they know that, and I know it, the President knows it too.

When I said to some of my friends, poor trembling Negroes, that they had many things to worry about but that invasion was not one of them, they asked me, "But do you think that the President is lying? Why should he lie? He only wants to protect the people." My friends, and particularly my young friends, let me show you how a President can lie. I went to hear President Wilson speak in 1916. He said that we must vote for him because he was the man who had kept us out of war. And as soon as he had won the elections he carried out the plan he had had in his pocket for almost a year before the elections, and we were in the war before you could wink. Since that time, my friends,

ow how Presidents can lie. Wilson wanted to get us in and he used one jive. Roosevelt wants to get us in and he is using another one. He wants to frighten us with the fear of invasion, although his own generals and admirals tell us the exact opposite.

Defend What Democracy?

My friends, why does the President want us to fight? He and all the writers in the papers say that it is to defend our democracy. Our democracy! My friends, when I heard that I laughed for ten minutes. Yes. Laughed. I'll tell you why. It was because I was so damned mad that if I didn't laugh I would have broken the radio. And that radio cost me $4 in the pawn shop and I didn't want to break it.

Tell me, Mr. President, what democracy do I defend by going to fight Hitler? Hitler is a vile criminal and should be driven off the face of the earth. But I have no democracy and the democracy I haven't got Hitler didn't take from me. I know all those who have been taking away democracy from me and my people. They are Cotton Ed Smith, Senator Bilbo, Vice-President Garner, all of them aided by you, President Roosevelt for all of you are in one Party together, the Democratic

nd if you were any friend of the N yo uldn't be working so closely in the same Party with these Negro-hating, Negro-baiting little American Hitlers from the South. William Green, president of the American Federation of Labor, who discriminates against Negroes in his unions is another. There are thousands of others I could name. They have been lynching me and my people, giving us the dirtiest jobs, at the lowest pay, Jim Crowing us, taking the taxes we pay to teach white children, treating us worse than they treat their dogs. They were doing all this before Hitler was born, they do it now, they will do it long after Hitler is dead, unless we Negroes ourselves put a stop to it. I never heard any fireside chat from you, Mr. President, I never saw any campaign carried out by the Senate to give the American Negroes democracy, for instance, to pass the anti-lynching bill or abolish Jim Crow, and the poll tax which prevents Negroes in the South from voting. May I tell you Mr. President, politely as suits a fireside chat, that you and the hypocritical scoundrels who rule this country with you, should stop being so active in defense of democracy abroad and pay attention to the crimes against democracy at home. Instead, your newspapers spread a lot of lies about no lynchings having taken place dur-

...ne past year. As if they don't know that ...days the Southern lynchers get together in ...nts ll bands and murder any Negro whom they want to get rid of, very quietly so as to keep it out of the papers.

The Fifth Column

My friends, the President warns us about the fifth column. I understand that this is the new name for the enemies of democracy. Where have the President's eyes been all this time? If he wants to find out who these fifth column people are, he just has to ask the Negroes. We know them. We spend our lives fighting against them. If the President sends a reporter to me, with a large notebook, I guarantee that between sunrise and sundown tomorrow I'll point out to him more fifth column enemies of democracy then he can find room for in all the jails of this country. No, Mr. President, we'll begin to listen to you about the fifth column when you begin to put in jail some of the really big enemies of democracy in this country, beginning with the United States Vice-President, Jack Garner, boss of the Jim Crow state of Texas.

My friends, the President and all the papers say that we must stop aggression. But when Mussolini made his aggression against Ethiopia, you, Mr.

...ent, prevented us from sending arms ... opia. Where was all your hatred of aggression the. But I notice that today you have the American their fleet ready to fight Japan for the Dutch East Indies. ...ide My wife Leonora, who is a Red, tells me that ...and America wants to fight Germany to prevent Hitler ...s taking the colonies of the Allied countries, and to keep Germany as much as possible out of the fat trade with China and Spanish America. That makes sense to me. But what I know is this, that ...ucy whatever President Roosevelt wants to fight about, it is not democracy. I have no interests in the Dutch East Indies. The natives there got no democracy from the Dutch. They will get no democracy from America. They will get none from Japan. They will get some democracy only when they drive out all these leeches and take charge of their country themselves.

Democracy Begins at Home

My friends, it is not only the poor Negroes who get no democracy. The other day I saw a picture, "The Grapes of Wrath." In it I saw whites, miserable and suffering almost as much as we Negroes suffer. Every week outside the relief station there are whites standing with me, no better off than I am. If these poor Okies and the Negroes and the

workers were to get together we could fight for some real democracy here. That is the fight I am willing to begin. I know who my enemies are. And when these same enemies come telling me about going to fight against Hitler, what I tell them in my mind is what would be very out of place in a fireside chat, so you will have to guess at it.

I know a Negro school teacher who says that we must fight with Roosevelt to defeat Hitler. I want to see Hitler defeated but why should I trust Roosevelt? How do I know that Roosevelt at some time or other wouldn't turn traitor? Look at the King of Belgium. He must have told the poor Belgians to come and fight with him for democracy. Now he has surrendered to Hitler and next thing he will be helping Hitler to impose fascism on the Belgian people. That is what you get when you listen to these Kings and Presidents and Generals all urging poor people to come and fight against Hitler. I have been watching that school teacher a long time. And I think that what he wants to defend is not democracy but the $35 a week he gets for teaching in the Jim Crow school. If he wants to die for democracy and his $35, that is his business. But he isn't going to lead me into that. When we have defeated the enemies of democracy here, then we can give Hitler a beating. I would be ready to fight against Hitler then.

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Unite and Fight!

My friends, Negroes are well known for their belief in God. And I notice that a good fireside chat always has something in it about God and prayers. But I notice too that Hitler in all his speeches talks about God and asks for his blessing. President Wilson, that smooth tongued rascal, was full of God too. But Roosevelt, Hitler and Wilson not only pray to God, but see to it that they have guns, battleships and planes. So tonight, my friends, my dear friends, I want to leave out the prayers and tell you plainly what is my policy for the American people and the Negroes in particular. It is this. Unite and fight for our democracy here. What I as a black man want is a steady job. I want good wages, $30 a week for 30 hours a week. I want a good relief check when I am out of work. I want my black children to go to any school in the neighborhood. I want a good house and I want it where I choose to have it. I want to travel where I want, go where I want, eat where I want, join any union or organization that I want. I want this for myself, I want it for all my black people, and if any white man is prepared to join with us to fight for that, I want it for him too. And it isn't Hitler who is keeping these things from me. It is those

...no are robbing, cheating and insulting m... ple.

My friends, to win those things I am prepared to fight. I may go to jail in that fight. I may get shot down by the police but I'll die contented. Death is death and I prefer to die fighting here for my rights and the rights of my people and those who will fight with us, than die so that President Roosevelt and his friends might get the Dutch East Indies or the British West Indies or any kind of Indies whatsoever. So, my friends, good night. I shall not quote scripture but I shall end with a piece of personal history. I went to the last war. I was treated like a dog before I went. I was treated like a dog while I was there. I was treated like a dog when I returned. I have been played for a sucker before, and I am not going to be played again.

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